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Cinema, thought, immanence: Contemplating signs and empty spaces in the films of Ozu

Andrew Lapworth, University of Bristol

Abstract

In his two-volume study of the cinema, Deleuze develops a novel conception of film in terms of its relation to the intensive becomings of thought. Great directors, for Deleuze, are those who invent images that stage disruptions to the habits of ordinary perception, forcing us to think and feel differently. It is precisely in terms of the production of a different style of cinematic thinking that we might frame encounters with the films of director Ozu Yasujirō, who I argue inaugurates a cinema in which *contemplation* replaces the primacy and certainties of action. Following Deleuze's ([1968] 2004) rethinking of 'contemplation' as immanent event rather than subjective transcendence, I explore how Ozu's cinema generates transformative modes of thinking the city, uncoupling urban spaces from the requirements of dramatic action such that they become expressive sites of indeterminate signs and affects. By dramatizing these immanent thresholds of affective and spatial becomings, I argue Ozu's contemplative cinema directs us towards new possible openings of thought to a politics of the virtual.

Keywords

Gilles Deleuze

Ozu Yasujirō

Tokyo

cinema

contemplation

signs

affect

Introduction: Thinking film after Deleuze and Ozu

In his two-volume study of the cinema, Gilles Deleuze ([1983] 2005, [1985] 2005) develops a novel conception film in terms of its relation to the intensive processes and becomings of thought. Opposing the psychoanalytic and linguistic approaches that dominated the film theory of his time (Stam 2000), Deleuze instead argues that film stages a direct affective shock to the brain, which involve the creative destruction of pre-given channels and the tracing of ‘uncharted’ lines of thought (1995: 60–61). By opening theorizations of the cinematic encounter to the materialities of affect and sensation, Deleuze seeks to unsettle representational assumptions of the relationship between thought and cinema itself.

Following Deleuze, cinema is not simply a representational object that philosophy would reflect on (or ‘bring thought to’), but is instead a ‘machinic space’ of thinking productive of its own ‘cinematic thoughts and ideas’, which it thinks through the compositions of images and signs it produces (Huygens 2007; Bogue 2003). In an interview with Hervé Guibert following the publication of the first volume of his *Cinema* project, Deleuze states that his central argument in these books can be summarized quite simply: ‘The great auteurs of film are thinking, thought exists in their work, and making a film is creative, living thought’ (Deleuze 2006: 220). It is this capacity of cinema to generate a different sense of *what it means to think* which underwrites Deleuze’s famous thesis of the post-war transition from the ‘movement-image’ of classical cinema to the ‘time-image’ of modern cinema. This shift between regimes of the image is thus associated with a concomitant transformation in forms

of thinking, from the ‘sensori-motor thought’ of the movement-image where thought is predisposed to functional and narratable sequences of recognitions and actions, to an intensive ‘thought-without-image’ generated by the time-image in which thinking becomes untethered from action-oriented perception to forge new connections with the virtuality of time (Flaxman 2000: 3). The greatest film-makers, for Deleuze, are therefore those who compose images that express new intense configurations of forces and virtualities in thought, disrupting habitual circuits of sense-making in ways that experiment with other ways of seeing, feeling and acting (Deleuze [1985] 2005; Rajchman 2009). Hence Deleuze’s claim that cinema invents ‘new possibilities of life’ (2001: 66), or as Paola Marrati puts it, cinema’s images present us with ‘other liveable configurations of thought’ (2008: 79).

In this article, I argue that it is precisely in terms of the invention of new creative configurations of thought and life that we might reframe the stakes of cinematic encounters with the films of the Japanese director, Ozu Yasujiro. Indeed, Ozu occupies a pivotal and unique position in the unfolding of Deleuze’s thought in the *Cinema* books (Cazdyn 2002; Deamer 2009). Of the hundreds of film directors Deleuze discusses, Ozu represents one of the very few non-western directors that he engages (along with his Japanese compatriots Mizoguchi Kenji and Kurosawa Akira) when elaborating his arguments (Martin-Jones 2011; Steintrager 2014). Deleuze ([1985] 2005: 13) provides an extended discussion of Ozu’s films in the first chapter of *Cinema 2* ([1985] 2005), where Ozu is celebrated for ‘exploring and anticipating’, before the crisis of the war and in a Japanese context, the ‘direct image of time’ that would become the vocation of Italian neo-realism and the French and German New Waves in the 1950s and 1960s. Taking this discussion of Ozu in *Cinema 2* ([1985] 2005) as my starting point, I want to draw out the implications of an encounter between Deleuze’s philosophy and the cinema of Ozu in two main ways. First, and *thinking Ozu through Deleuze*, I explore how Deleuze’s philosophy challenges established interpretations of Ozu’s

films. The history of Ozu's reception in the western academic literature can be described as a kind of 'tug-of-war' between two main theoretical camps (Mars-Jones 2011: 34). Comprising one camp are the interpretations of the 'Zen-transcendentals', most notably Don Richie (1974) and Paul Schrader (1972), who see in Ozu's films the expression of some authentically Japanese sensibility or transcendent aesthetic.¹ In the other camp are the neo-formalist interpretations of authors such as Kristin Thompson (in Thompson and Bordwell 1978) and David Bordwell (1988), who are critical of such correlations between Ozu's films and the cultural principles of Zen Buddhism, and who instead draw attention to Ozu's 'modernist' technical style and distinctive narrative form. What Deleuze's philosophy offers is a very different approach to Ozu's films, one that allows us to think in more *ontological* (rather than formal) and *immanent* (rather than transcendent) terms about the potentials of the cinematic encounter. For Deleuze, what Ozu inaugurates is precisely a new style of cinematic thinking, one in which 'contemplation' and thought replace the primacy and subjective certainties of action (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 15).

One of the key implications of Ozu's contemplative cinema is how it serves to generate new and transformative modes of thinking urban space. Focussing my discussion specifically on his use of techniques of false continuity, disconnection and the filming of empty spaces in two of his post-war films – *Tokyo Monogatari/Tokyo Story* (Ozu, 1953) and *Akibiyori/Late Autumn* (Ozu, 1960) – I explore how Ozu's cinema reinvents our conventional ways of thinking and perceiving the everyday spaces of the city, opening creative possibilities 'to see the world anew' (Rushton 2012: 64). Following Deleuze, I argue that we can understand Ozu's cinematic techniques of framing and presenting the city as not just formal innovations – as Bordwell and Thompson (1978) argue – but also as ontological functions that serve to uncouple urban spaces and landscapes from the requirements of sensori-motor

thought and action such that they become expressive sites of indeterminate signs and unexpected intensities of affect.

Of course, Deleuze is not the only scholar to have identified a ‘contemplative’ tenor or style to Ozu’s films (Wills 1978). In recent years, a number of authors have heralded Ozu as the forefather of a contemporary style of ‘contemplative’ or ‘slow’ cinema that is exemplified in the work of modern directors he has influenced, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Koreeda Hirokazu, Jia Zhangke, Claire Denis, Abbas Kiarostami, Kim Ki-Duk and others (Jaffe 2014; Flanagan 2008). This ‘contemplative’ style of modern film-making is defined by its privileging of a number of distinct cinematic tropes, such as the use of long takes, non-linear and non-dramatic narratives, and an emphasis on a minimalist style of composition and visual content. In their influential readings of Ozu’s cinema, Richie (1974) and Schrader (1972) similarly note a contemplative tone to his films, highlighting various instances of characters in quiet and still contemplation as clear expressions of a Zen aesthetic and spirituality that they believe permeates his films. Turning my attention to the philosophical development of a more ontogenetic understanding of ‘contemplation’ in *Difference and Repetition*, I argue that what sets Deleuze’s ([1968] 2004) philosophical encounter apart from the more spiritualist interpretations of authors such as Schrader and Richie is how he understands these instances of contemplation not as subjective forms of *transcendence*, but instead as *immanent* and impersonal events of ‘individuation’. At stake in Ozu’s ‘contemplative cinema’ for Deleuze is thus not the ‘transcendent break’ that would lead us out of the affective tensions and disparities of the world (Schrader 1972: 37), but rather an immanent reconfiguration of these tensions that reveal new possible connections of thought, urban space and time.

Second, and conversely, the final sections of the article also explore how *thinking Deleuze through Ozu* might enable us to readdress certain critical interpretations of his

philosophy. While other authors have explored the significance of Ozu for understanding Deleuze in terms of the mutual influence of Zen Buddhist philosophy (e.g. the conception of time as *aion*),² in this article I focus instead on how Ozu's contemplative cinema provides Deleuze an affirmative site for challenging the sovereignty of action over thought in traditional theorizations of politics. At first glance, this might seem like an unusual focus for thinking about Ozu's films. Indeed, if there is one thing that unites the otherwise divergent Zen-transcendental interpretations of Schrader and Richie and the neo-formalist readings of Thompson and Bordwell, it is that Ozu's cinema is resolutely *apolitical*, expressing an indifference to actual social relations and forces except as they impact on family relations (Mars-Jones 2011). I argue that these criticisms of Ozu have interesting parallels with the recent critiques of a 'Deleuzian politics' that we find in the work of Peter Hallward (2006) and Alain Badiou (1999), which, they argue, demands a paralysis of transformative action in favour of 'spiritual communion with an otherworldly power' (Hallward 2006: 162). In this article I instead explore how both Deleuze and Ozu enact a different thinking of contemplation, understood not as a passive form of stasis but as an encounter with the *powerlessness* of previously sanctioned responses to the emergent forces and signs comprising a new problematic field, an event through which thought is propelled to become creative (Hughes 2012). The event of contemplation thus becomes a central element of what Deleuze defines as the political task of 'becoming-active' (2001: 82), generating intervals and interruptions in our habitual, action-oriented perception that may allow other creative thoughts, dispositions, and actions to ferment.

From action to contemplation: The cinema of Ozu

In a career spanning five decades (from 1927 until his death in 1963) and 54 films, Ozu cultivated and refined a singular and experimental cinematic style that continues to inspire and move audiences encountering his films today. Commencing from some of his earliest silent films of the 1930s, and working closely alongside his long-term scriptwriter Noda Kōgo, Ozu sought to distance himself from some of the narrative conventions, norms and techniques that were the staple of an increasingly dominant ‘Hollywood’ model of cinematic production. The film theorist Noel Burch, in a book on Japanese cinema frequently referenced by Deleuze in the *Cinema* texts, argues that Ozu’s cinema challenges two central principles defining the dominant ‘Western mode of cinematic representation’ (1979: 159). First, Ozu rejected the *anthropocentric* focus of Hollywood dramaturgy that centres the image on the thoughts and actions of human characters. One of Ozu’s cinematic signatures then are his frequent shots of ‘empty spaces’ characterized by the prolonged and ‘unmotivated’ absence of humans from the screen (Burch 1979: 161). The second principle of the western system of representation challenged by Ozu was its emphasis on formal and narrative *continuity* (Burch 1979; Bordwell 1988). For example, an important technique employed by Ozu in a number of his films is ‘mismatched eyelines’, typically involving the characters looking disorientingly straight into the camera, which, as Thompson and Bordwell note, ‘refuses to inscribe the spectator in a fixed relaying position with respect to spatial and diegetic closure’, such that ‘the viewer must frequently reorient him- or herself in the spatial framework of the scene’ (1978: 63). Ozu also eschews expectations of narrative continuity through techniques of *spatial disconnection* – such as in *Bakushu/Early Summer* (Ozu, 1951), where the scene unexpectedly shifts from a shot of a corridor in a restaurant where the protagonist is tiptoeing to surprise a friend to a shot of a corridor in her home in a single cut – as well as through *narrative ellipsis* by entirely skipping over events and moments that would

usually constitute the dramatic core of a Hollywood film – such as the event of Noriko’s wedding in *Banshun/Late Spring* (Ozu, 1949) or the death of the mother in *Tokyo Story*.

More generally, Ozu’s use of such creative techniques can be understood as a strategy for countering the primacy of *dramatic action* in classical Hollywood cinema. In a famous statement on his cinematic style following the release of *Late Autumn* in 1960, one most likely made in riposte to the growing critiques of his conservative and ‘boring’ films by the young directors of Japan’s ‘sun-tribe’ (*taiyozoku*) movement (Burch 1979: 279), Ozu remarked:

It is easy to create drama through actions and emotions in film – my aim is to make people *feel* without resorting to drama [...] For a long time, I have wanted to do away with dramatic elements, to express sorrow without tears, to capture a sense of life without any emotional upheaval. (Ozu 1960: 93)

Of course, there is a danger of reading too much into this statement and thinking that Ozu therefore rejected the narrative and affective potentials of dramatic narrative and form. On the contrary, films such as *Ukikusa/Floating Weeds* (Ozu, 1959), *Kaze no Naka no Mendori/A Hen in the Wind* (Ozu, 1948), and *Tokyo Boshoku/Tokyo Twilight* (Ozu, 1957) are clearly oriented around strong dramatic events and actions. What Ozu disliked about dramatic action was not necessarily the idea of drama itself, but rather the *logic of thought* its manifestation in cinema typically implies. Ozu therefore sought to disrupt the cause-and-effect logic and temporality of dramatic narration that ties the primacy of recognized emotions, themselves attached to distinct subjects and objects, with the decisive certainties of action.

Ozu’s remarks have a number of interesting resonances with Deleuze’s ([1983] 2005) discussion of the ‘crisis of the action-image’ in the final chapters of *Cinema I* ([1983] 2005).

Deleuze defines the ‘action-image’, which he argues constitutes the nucleus of classical Hollywood cinema, as a synthesis of perception (of an object or situation) and affection (of a subject): ‘the pair of object and emotion thus appears in the action-image as its genetic sign’ ([1983] 2005: 163). Deleuze writes that in the cinema of the action-image we typically see the forces and tensions of a milieu construct a situation that surrounds the protagonist, constituting a demand to which he or she must respond. The character responds decisively with actions that transform the situation and which involve new relationships of the individual to their milieu as well as to other characters. The experience for the spectator encountering action-image films also tends to be one of *orientation* to the direction of narrative flow, as well as to the elements within the image that are crucial to an understanding of the whole. Following the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Deleuze argues that the logic of thought determining this unity of perception and action in the action-image is a logic of ‘recognition’ (Deleuze [1983] 2005: 146). In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson defines recognition as ‘the concrete process by which we grasp the past in the present’ ([1896] 1991: 90) or, in other words, the way in which a subject draws on past experience to condition a present action. One of Bergson’s main points here is that the material process of recognition rarely passes through representation or conscious activity, but is instead the outcome of a series of involuntary, motor mechanisms created by repetition. This automatic mechanism is what Deleuze ([1966]1988: 67) terms, after Bergson, ‘sensori-motor recognition’, which isolates from within the continuous flux of experience only those elements that are of immediate interest, and which is attentive only to those fragments of the past relevant to our present needs. Sensori-motor recognition, as Anne Sauvagnargues (2013: 171) puts it, ‘speaks directly to our muscles and the back of our knees’, inspiring a specific affective scheme within us whereby what is perceived immediately releases the interested action as a function of multiple social interests that we judge and to which we are subjected. As an

automatic and unthinking perception of the world, the sensori-motor schema at the heart of the action-image serves to stabilize intellectual and corporeal forces in ways that inhibit the creative emergence of new thoughts and relations.

The ‘crisis of the action image’ that Deleuze ([1983] 2005: 216) identifies emerging in European cinema following the devastation of World War II (and even earlier in the case of Ozu) is thus also a crisis of sensori-motor thought and recognition. In the first chapter of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze ([1985] 2005) notes that this delinking of images from the sensori-motor schema in modern cinema opens new virtual powers and potentialities of the image. Instead of being integrated through logics of action or narration, this new cinema of ‘the time-image’ assembles dispersive events and situations through ‘deliberately weak’, ‘elliptical’, and ‘irrational’ links ([1985] 2005: 15). Space is also profoundly affected in this new cinema. Importantly, Deleuze locates the emergence of the time-image in the urban realities of war-torn Europe and its legacy of cities in ruin (Pratt and San Juan 2014). As Deleuze writes: ‘In the city which is being demolished or rebuilt, neo-realism makes any-space-whatevers proliferate – urban cancer, undifferentiated fabrics, pieces of waste-ground – which are opposed to the determined spaces of the old realism’ ([1983] 2005: 216). In the modern cinema of the time-image then, the filming of well-defined places and recognizable features of the urban landscape (skyscrapers, landmarks) give way to the presentation of ‘any-space-whatevers’ that no longer provide the appropriate setting for a determined action or situation but which instead embody the qualities of ‘pure potential’ (Deleuze [1983] 2005: 113): city spaces devoid of human movement (Michelangelo Antonioni), deserted landscapes and exteriors (Roberto Rossellini), or domestic interiors evacuated of their occupants (Ozu). Instead of serving as mere context or narrative support then, these fragmentary any-space-whatevers function to disrupt the established coordinates of time, knowledge and memory in the city, opening urban spaces to new virtual conjunctions and potentials. Furthermore, and in

contrast to the rational ‘agents’ of the ‘movement-image’, the characters wandering through these deserted and disconnected spaces of the city are instead ‘seers’ who no longer know how to respond to the events that befall them (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 2). As Deleuze writes in *Bergsonism* ([1968] 1988), this ‘seer’ is a subject for whom ‘recognition has become impossible [...] the subject no longer knows how to orient himself, how to draw, that is, to decompose an object according to the motor tendencies’ (1991: 68). Thought in the time-image thus no longer extends directly into pre-established patterns of action, but instead ‘lingers, oscillates, hallucinates’ (Flaxman 2000: 39). The gradual erosion of the sensori-motor links governing the action-image gives rise to new types of cinematic image, images which must be seen, heard, and ‘read’, rather than simply recognized and reacted to (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 21).

Deleuze argues that the first compelling challenge to a cinema defined by the action-image and sensori-motor recognition emerges in the films of Ozu. More specifically, he credits Ozu as the ‘inventor’ of what he terms ‘opsigns’ and ‘sonsigns’, which are defined as images that suspend thinking in a purely optical or sound situation that ‘does not extend into action any more than it is induced by action’ (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 17). Such situations, he goes on to write, force us to ‘grasp something intolerable and unthinkable in our present situation’, which cannot be understood or acted on according to extant habits of recognition or association, but that instead emerge in the mode of an *encounter* that can only be felt by character and viewer alike. These unthinkable situations in cinema could be the outcome of specific limit-situations – such as the daughter’s suicide in Ozu’s *Tokyo Twilight* (1957) – or, and more typically in Ozu, the unbearable and inexpressible intensities invoked by the banal rituals of family life, but in either case they give rise to new relations of forces that outstrip sensori-motor capacities, opening thought to the creative possibilities of *thinking differently*.

The optical and sound images we encounter in Ozu's films thus demand a different mode of attention and thinking than that associated with the action-image of classical cinema. Thus, whereas the sensori-motor action-image retains from the thing only those qualities and elements that interest us, the opsign 'brings the thing each time to an essential singularity, and describe the inexhaustible, endlessly referring to other descriptions' (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 43). Such images are infinitely richer because they involve what Deleuze (1991: 68) terms, again following Bergson, modes of 'attentive recognition' that 'bring us back to the object' in order to restore its singular and indeterminate forces and potentialities. In unsettling the sensori-motor circuit that binds perception to action, Ozu's cinema constructs alternative circuits that put perception directly into contact with thought. The empty spaces and still lifes that populate his films are thus not sites of recognizable action, but might instead be understood as what Deleuze terms instances of 'pure contemplation' that bring about 'the immediate identity of the subject and the object, the world and the I' ([1985] 2005: 15). At first glance, and in terms of the usual meaning ascribed to the concept in philosophy, 'contemplation' would appear to presuppose the forms of ontological separation (i.e. contemplating subject/ contemplated object) that run contrary to the kind of immanent process Deleuze is seeking to identify here (Zourabichvili 2012: 115; Buchanan 1999). However, if we turn to *Difference and Repetition* we can see that Deleuze ([1968] 2004: 94) actually makes an important distinction between two different modes of contemplation. On the one hand we have the 'active synthesis' that corresponds to our traditional understanding of contemplation as a subjective form of reflection and recognition (e.g. 'the chess player contemplates his next move'). Contemplation in the active synthesis is oriented towards action, and moves in the direction of actual objects recognized as necessary to achieve this action. But Deleuze also argues that this active synthesis is itself dependent on an originary and non-conscious 'passive synthesis', which he defines as an impersonal event of

individuation constituting these active forms of sensibility (Deleuze [1968] 2004: 100). The passive synthesis of contemplation thus involves the immanent capture and contraction of material forces to produce a new individuation, such as the formation of the eye out of soft tissue that is successful in capturing and organizing the flow of light (Zourabichvili 2012: 115). Deleuze notes that the passive synthesis does not give rise to the actual forms and representational objects that comprise the sensori-motor recognition of the active synthesis, but instead involves the manufacture of a different ‘virtual object’ – *the sign*. Departing from traditional semiotic approaches that reduce the sign to questions of signification and representation, Deleuze argues that signs are instead linked to material events of thought and affect, ‘act[ing] directly on the nervous system, rather than passing through the detour of the brain’ ([1981] 2005: 43). Thought materially encounters the sign as the expression of an ‘enveloped possible world unknown to us’, comprising forces and ‘points of view’ that exceed the sensori-motor image we have of a particular object or situation (Deleuze [1964] 2008: 6). As I highlight in the following section, what Ozu’s films can be understood to realize and give expression to is precisely this creative vocation of cinema: the production of non-representational signs that cannot be situated within the topos of recognition, and which thus confront thought with what it has yet to think.

Contemplating signs and empty spaces

Whilst Ozu’s films rarely departed from the central narrative themes of the *shomin-geki*, a film genre that took as its focus the everyday rituals and ordinary routines of contemporary Japanese life (such as intergenerational disagreements and squabbles, the struggles of parenthood, dinner reunions with old friends), his cinematic innovation was to move beyond the logics of sensori-motor recognition by which these rituals are typically given form.

Crucial to Ozu's disruption of sensori-motor thought were his creative experiments with the cinematic techniques of *ellipsis* and *false continuity* that instead foreground the indeterminate possibilities of sensations and affects. Whereas Noel Burch (1979: 277) claims that the stylistic traits that defined the dynamic potential of Ozu's earlier work become rather stale and repetitive in his later films, and especially following his turn to colour in the late 1950s, I argue that these later films actually provide some of the most innovative and varied illustrations of his continually developing cinematic thought and style. *Late Autumn* (Ozu, 1960), a film that reworks the father-daughter plot of his 1949 film *Late Spring* but focussing instead on the widowed mother-daughter relationship,³ while often considered an inferior remake is actually a technically and affectively different kind of film. What comes to the fore in this film, perhaps more so than in any of his others, is Ozu's creative play with difference and indeterminacy. A particularly evocative example of this indeterminacy is a sequence towards the end of the film where both the mother (Akiko – played by Hara Setsuko) and the daughter (Ayako – played by Tsukasa Yoko) are enjoying a last spa break before the daughter's impending marriage. During this scene, Ayako, who has reluctantly agreed to marry on the basis of a series of misunderstandings that she was an obstacle to her mother's own plans for remarriage, suddenly breaks down crying. Noticeably absent from this sequence, however, are the narrative devices and elements, such as continuity of dialogue and eye-line matches, which would allow us to ascribe a precise meanings to these tears. The fragmentary clues and imprecise signs in this expression of emotion interrupt our habits of recognition and interpretation as viewers – we are left uncertain as to whether they symbolize tears of selfishness or selflessness, happiness or sadness. Instead of resolving this question, Ozu leaves us with these missing pieces, cutting to an image of a forested mountain at the bottom of which a group of school children are lining up to take a photo, before returning to the mother and daughter packing their belongings to return home.

Through the use of such techniques of ellipsis in his films, Ozu sought to disrupt the sensori-motor circuit that tethers perceptions and affections to the recognized actions that will arise in response to them. For Ozu, this cause-and-effect logic of dramatic narration gives the game away too easily, it fails to provoke thinking. The subjects populating Ozu's films are thus presented not as the assured agents of classical cinema that maintain their transcendent integrity through the vicissitudes of experience but instead as processes of becoming, their thoughts and gestures re-imagined as emergent expressions of the imperceptible forces and uncertain intensities that weave the immanent fabric of life. To further illustrate the creative implications of Ozu's use of ellipsis for thought we can turn to the very last scene of *Late Autumn*, in which we encounter the mother, Akiko, alone in her apartment following the event of her daughter's wedding (which in typical Ozu fashion is not shown). What this sequence highlights for our discussion is the affective potential of Ozu's distinctive use of spatial composition. While Ozu's spatial framing in this final sequence clearly isolates the physical fact of her isolation, his interruption of the narrative transition of her expression leave us, as viewers, partially uncertain of how to read the smile that slowly forms on Akiko's face. The space and time of this narrative transition is elided through irrational cuts to spaces beyond the periphery of action, such as a shot of the empty hallway outside her apartment. Burch (1979: 169) famously calls these ambivalent spatial cutaways 'pillow-shots',⁴ which serve to interrupt the viewer's sense of orientation to the sequence through images that are unattributable to the perceptions, actions or interests of any individual character. Following Deleuze ([1985] 2005: 15), we might argue that images such as this of Akiko's elusive smile are expressions of what he terms 'pure contemplation', which seek to extend the affective experience of our encounter with the image rather than allow it to resolve itself into pre-established cognitions. Through these sequences in *Late Autumn*, I think we can begin to grasp more firmly how Deleuze re-imagines the 'contemplative' potentials of

Ozu's cinema: its capacity to extract from immanent worlds of tension and disparity new affective signs (Ayako's tears, Akiko's smile) that generate creative disturbances in the sensori-motor circuit driving perception to action, catalysing a different kind of thinking and feeling at the limits of extant capacities.

<<insert figure 1 here>>

Of course, another feature integral to this interruptive potential of Ozu's films are his experiments with techniques of spatial framing and composition when filming the spaces of the city. The events of almost all of Ozu's films take place in the city of Tokyo where he lived most of his life, and five of his films even have the word 'Tokyo' in their title (Berra 2011).⁵ As John Berra (2015: 12) notes, Tokyo is thus a constant presence in Ozu's films, but it is a presence that is often only indirectly felt through his use of transitions and cutaways to the spaces, scenes and sounds of everyday urban life. The Tokyo expressed in his films, however, is not the sweeping cityscape or neon-lit skyscrapers to which we might be accustomed, but is rather the interior spaces of new suburban residences and the cramped alleyways of old entertainment districts. Urban experience in Ozu's cinema is thus marked by a profound sense of disorientation for both viewers and characters alike, whether this is the disorientation of elderly relatives overwhelmed by the frenetic bustle and vast concrete expanse of the city (*Tokyo Story*), or of young children confused and frustrated by the social mores and conventions of suburban life (*Ohayo!/Good Morning!*). A clear example of this spatial disorientation is a scene in *Tokyo Story* in which Noriko (Hara Setsuko) takes her elderly in-laws on a bus tour through central Tokyo, which as the tour guide announces attempts to 'trace the illustrious history of this great city' (Ozu, 1953). In this sequence, Ozu cuts between close-ups of the mother and father following the tour guide's directions inside

the bus, to passing shots of the bustling avenues of the Ginza district looking out of the front window of the bus. Leaving the bus tour, the family climb the exterior stairs of one of Ginza's department stores for a panoramic view of the city, but appear disappointed when they are unable to orient themselves in relation to the households and locales of the few people they know in the city. Expressed in this sequence, I argue, is a different cinematic thinking of urban space, one which disrupts conventional understandings of the city as a continuous whole that could be grasped in its totality. Ozu's distinct use of techniques of spatial framing and editing in this sequence instead presents Tokyo as a vibrant mass of fragmented and disconnected spaces, organized not around a hierarchical centre but rather through the discontinuous affective contrasts of domestic interiors and monumental office buildings and residential complexes (Guattari 2015).

In filming these interior and exterior spaces of the city, one of the key traits of the classical cinema of action that Ozu consistently sought to undo was the subordination of urban space to the logics of dramatic narrative, in which space is 'used up' by the presentation of narratively important settings, dominant actions, or psychological traits of characters (Thompson and Bordwell 1978: 42). Through the use of techniques of urban disconnection (as in the tour-bus sequence above) and spatial vacuity, Ozu can be understood to shift the ontological axis of his images of the city from action to affect and thought (Clarke and Doel 2007). Of all his films, *Tokyo Story* (Ozu, 1953) again presents one of the most evocative illustrations of Ozu's distinctive style of spatial framing. In *Tokyo Story* we see the way in which Ozu subtly yet insistently rejects classical cinematographic techniques of spatial framing – such as the 180-degree rule and establishing shots that orientate the viewer to the space–time of action on-screen – in favour of frequently punctuating his films with images of *empty spaces* (of contiguous urban landscapes or empty rooms) that are devoid of any narrative reference to the actual perspectives or movements of characters. By introducing

a hiatus in the diegetic flow linking human perceptions to action, Deleuze ([1985] 2005) argues that Ozu's empty spaces are more than just aesthetic motifs (à la Richie) but, rather, ontological techniques that discover new affective potentials of the image defined in terms of its capacity to open an intensive thinking of time and becoming beyond action and subjectivity.

<<insert figure 2 here>>

The urban spaces encountered in *Tokyo Story* are thus no longer the passive backdrops of classical cinema, which are subordinated to the pre-given needs and goals of human action. Drawing on a concept from Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of individuation and the topological psychology of Kurt Lewin, Deleuze calls this type of narrative space, structured by the sensori-motor schema of its characters, 'hodological space', in which we discover a 'principle of individuation' (i.e. the motivations and actions of a particular character in the film) that is able 'to explain, produce, and determine the subsequent course of individuation' (the events that we see unfold on-screen) (Simondon 1992: 297). In Ozu's films we see instead a less clearly delineated and prescribed form of cinematic space begin to emerge: 'a space before action, a pre-hodological space, in which disparate tendencies communicate and overlap without being organised according to sensori-motor schemata' (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 125). Pre-hodological spaces are thus spaces of undecidability and possibility, opening thought to different narrative directions and other potential ways of perceiving the world (Holtmeier 2014).

With Ozu we encounter how, in the modern cinema of the time-image, urban spaces are increasingly detached from the psychology of the subject to instead become modes of sensation that forces us to think. As Rajchman writes: 'The world that cinema shows us is an

impersonal world prior to subjective consciousness and individualisation [...] modern cinema thus maps the workings of a space and time at once preindividual and unconscious' (2009: 289–90). In sum, then, and by disengaging signs and sensations from the transcendent forms that would supposedly ground and organize them (sensori-motor subjectivity, representational or 'hodological' space), what Ozu foregrounds is the creative potential of the cinematic image to modulate and reconfigure immanent fields of force and process, which through their intensive variations put established thoughts and identities into crisis (Canning 2000).

Ozu and a cinematic thinking of immanence

It is this immanent reframing of Ozu's contemplative cinema – a cinema that does not lead to a horizon beyond forms of actuality so much as disperse and reconfigure them – that distinguishes Deleuze's philosophical encounter from the transcendent interpretations we find in the work of director and film critic Paul Schrader (1972). In his 1972 book, *Transcendental Style in Film* (1972), Schrader attempts to outline what he sees as the common style and thought through which 'the transcendent' is given expression in film. Analysing the work of Carl Dreyer and Robert Bresson, as well as Ozu, Schrader argues that we can identify a standard formula for this 'transcendental style' in cinema, involving the emergence of a sudden 'disparity in everyday life' that, in turn, leads to a 'decisive action' that does not resolve the disparity but 'transcends it' (Schrader 1972: 49). However, and whereas the 'decisive actions' in the films of Dreyer and Bresson are quite 'incredible events' (such as the raising of the dead, or the burning of Joan of Arc at the stake), Schrader notes that the equivalent actions are much less dramatic and obvious in Ozu's films, such as Noriko's sudden tears at the end of *Tokyo Story*. For Schrader, such emotional outbursts in

Ozu represent instances in which the ironies and disparities of the world overwhelm the subject, producing emotions that exceed the character's capacities of expression and which open instead to an experience of the transcendent.

<<insert figure 3 here>>

While Deleuze, like Schrader, identifies tension and disparity as important genetic elements in Ozu's cinema (e.g. the conflict between generations, between couples, and, after the war, between American and Japanese banality), his understanding of how Ozu's films express and resolve the conflicts of sense to which these give rise clearly differs. To draw out the different implications of Deleuze and Schrader's interpretations, we can turn to a scene that both discuss from the end of *Tokyo Story*. In this final coda we encounter the grandfather (Shukichi – played by Ozu regular Ryū Chishū) sitting alone at home after his wife's funeral. During this sequence, Ozu cuts between images showing Shukichi in quiet, contemplative repose and landscape shots of mountains rising above the harbour of his hometown of Onomichi. In his reading, Schrader (1972: 37) seeks to re-fill Ozu's codas of mountains and empty spaces with a transcendent presence, arguing that they are instances of the overcoming of the conflict between man and nature. Such sequences, Schrader writes, generate 'extraordinary and inexplicable breaks' in the perspective of the everyday, leading beyond the immanent conflicts and contradictions of the everyday 'towards a new horizon of the transcendent' (1972: 51). Deleuze, on the other hand, argues that Schrader is incorrect to think that such sequences in Ozu function as a transcendent break, theorising them instead as the expressions of immanent forces of reconstitution that create new intense connections of thought and world ([1985] 2005: 17). Schrader's misunderstanding, Deleuze writes, is a result of the strict metaphysical separation he maintains between the realm of the 'immanent

everyday' and the 'transcendent horizon' ([1985] 2005: 13–14). This transcendent thinking of the potentials of Ozu's cinema is something Deleuze seeks to critique in *Cinema 2* ([1985] 2005) through an engagement with the philosophy of Leibniz (Smith 2007). For Leibniz (1991: 5–6), the world is composed of immanent series that converge in a regular order but that only appear clearly as small sections and in a disrupted order, such that we tend to perceive breaks and disparities as things out of the ordinary. Schrader's reading of the 'extraordinary transcendent breaks' in the films of Ozu and others then, as Deleuze notes, is simply the result of his misunderstanding of the fact that 'the oddest adventures are easily explained, and that everything is made up of ordinary things' (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 14). One of the implications Deleuze draws here from Leibniz, and what he argues Ozu gives cinematic expression to, is a thought of the transcendent forms that organise sense (such as sensori-motor subjectivity, hodological space) not as absolute origins, but rather as contingent lines drawn through the virtual (Murphie 2009) – lines, he argues, that may be immanently redrawn.

With regards to the coda of the mountain at the end of *Tokyo Story*, Deleuze writes:

[N]ature does not, as Schrader believes, intervene in a decisive moment or in a clear break with everyday man. The splendour of nature, of a snow-covered mountain, tells us one thing only: everything is ordinary and regular, everything is everyday! Nature is happy to renew what man has broken, she restores what man sees shattered. And when a character emerges from a family conflict or a wake to contemplate the snow-covered mountain, it is as if he were seeking to restore to order the series upset in his house but reinstated by an unchanging, regular nature. ([1985] 2005: 15)

Ozu's 'instances of contemplation' are therefore re-imagined by Deleuze as events of individuation – as immanent acts of problem solving – that introduce new lines of communication between previously disparate tendencies and forces in ways that reshape the potential fields of thought, perception, and action. Here Ozu's cinema is rethought as opening towards an immanent virtuality that brings the senses into direct relation with thought and time (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 17). Framed through a Deleuzian lens of contemplative individuations, sequences such as those of Noriko's outpouring of tears in *Tokyo Story* or Akiko's final smile in *Late Autumn* can be understood not as attempts to resolve the impact of loss and the uncertain forces of the future by invoking a transcendent horizon (à la Schrader's interpretation). Instead these signs and sensations become disengaged from transcendental conditions to attest to the power of the immanent to affect bodies and situations from within, transforming them into something different (Murphie 2009). As I now turn to argue in conclusion, it is this defence of Ozu (as well as Deleuze) from such 'transcendent' and 'spiritualist' interpretations that provides an important step for articulating a different kind of thinking about the politics of cinema and contemplation.

Conclusion: Deleuze, Ozu, and a cinematic politics of contemplation

A common trope in much of the academic literature on Ozu's cinema has been the image of Ozu as a 'conservative' and 'apolitical' director, one who was stubbornly resistant to technological change (supposedly reflected in the fact that he came quite late to 'talkies' and to colour) as well as to broader societal shifts in values and attitudes (Schrader 1972: 18; Richie 1974). For the directors of Japan's New Wave in the 1960s such as Oshima Nagisa, Ozu film's depicted a tranquil society that no longer existed, bearing few traces of the tumultuous student protests and anti-occupation demonstrations gripping Japan at that time

(Bordwell 1988: 306).⁶ Deleuze himself was well aware of the critics in both Japan and Europe, such as Imamura Taihei, who dismissed any suggestion of the radical potential of Ozu's cinema, and who attacked it as 'insufficiently political for having replaced the potential of modifying action with a 'confused passivity' (Deleuze [1985] 2005: 18). Indeed, I argue that these criticisms of Ozu's cinema have interesting resonances with the contemporary critiques of a 'Deleuzian Politics' we find in the work of theorists such as Peter Hallward. In his book, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (2006), Hallward claims that Deleuze's 'passive' mode of philosophical vitalism – which favours the involuntary encounters of Leibnizian individuation over the voluntarist logics of the Kantian act – disables the possibilities of transformative action in favour of modes of abstract contemplation (2006: 163; see also Alliez et al. 2009: 161). Hallward argues that it is in Deleuze's discussion of modern cinema in *Cinema 2* ([1985] 2005), and specifically of the optical and sound images of Ozu, that one finds the strongest confirmation of this contemplative orientation of thought that opens 'towards a virtual plane leading forever out of our actual world' (2006: 115). The critique of Deleuze and Ozu advanced here by Hallward, however, is itself predicated on a hierarchical and reductive dualism of action and thought – what Hannah Arendt (1981: 6) famously identified as the superiority of '*vita activa*' over '*vita contemplativa*' – that lies at the basis of conventional theorizations of politics. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt (1981) thus highlights the way in which contemplation becomes distinguished from action as something 'passive' and 'apolitical', as a result of an understanding of thinking as a solitary activity involving withdrawal from others and the forces of the world. In Arendt's work, however, thought and contemplation are still understood as obstacles to political action insofar as they involve the destruction of established codes of conduct and values that subjects rely on in conducting their everyday lives. For Deleuze (2008: 61), in contrast, it is precisely thought's violence against the ready-

made clichés and habits of common sense that defines the political vocation and potential of thinking as a creative activity that opens towards the immanent production of the new.

In *Cinema 2* ([1985] 2005), Deleuze therefore offers a defence of Ozu's contemplative cinema from such political detractors when he writes that 'it is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way' ([1985] 2005: 19). Through his engagements with Ozu and other directors of 'the time-image', Deleuze attempts to think political agency anew, beyond dominant voluntarist and subjectivist conceptions, and to undo the structural division of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in order to rethink contemplation as a form of political action (Marrati 2008). Deleuze's point is that the force of contemplation in Ozu's cinema does not simply end with the crisis of recognition and paralysis of action, as Hallward argues. Rather, contemplation and thought become understood as individuating activities in the Simondonian sense, which intervene in and transform the pre-individual forces and intensities that are the ontogenetic conditions for novel becomings (Dillet 2013). In contrast to what we might term 'molar' theorizations of politics that would bind political processes to the intentions and actions of decisive human subjects, Deleuze conceives of contemplation and the cinematic signs it mobilizes as 'micropolitical', involving the cultivation of a heightened attunement of thought and bodies to the imperceptible differences 'that we neither intend, nor perceive, nor command' (Colebrook 2014: 106). Theorized as an intensive, micropolitical event, contemplation becomes re-imagined here as an immanent political process that reconnects modes of thought and action to the material forces that make them creative.

In contrast to the spiritualist interpretations of Hallward and Schrader, contemplation for Deleuze is thus not marked by a desire to escape actuality but rather by the potential for new and intensified engagements with *this* world. What encounters with the contemplative cinema of Ozu can be understood to open up and explore, then, are alternative registers of

temporal experience that imply other creative folds of thought, space, and agency. In this regard, Deleuze argued that the thought of modern cinema was much more advanced than conventional political philosophy, which remains tied to the temporalities of ‘action-oriented perception’ that overplay the sovereignty of subjective intention and agency to a thinking of politics (Connolly 2011: 4). The cinema of the time-image affirms what Scott Sharpe et al. recently describe as a ‘much more subtle temporality of politics, which our habitual ways of thinking and doing politics tend to underplay’ (2014: 116). This other mode of temporal experience involves the production of new material sensitivities to the emergent forces and affects that intensify the present and open thinking to the indeterminate potentials of futures yet to come. If the temporality of action-oriented perception is, as William Connolly notes, ‘necessary to life’, then this second and more contemplative experience of time is ‘indispensable to its richness’ (Connolly 2011: 4–5). The innovation and affective power of Ozu’s cinema is its creative exploration of how these disparate experiences fold into each other in the context of everyday urban life, intensifying action-oriented perception in ways that mobilize new possibilities of thinking and perceiving the world around us. When watching Ozu’s films then, what we encounter is a contemplative world of signs and empty spaces, one that immanently weaves the risings and fallings of the cicada’s song with a woman’s sobbing, and the image of a slowly forming smile to the distant sound of waves lapping against the harbour shore.

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Contributor details

Andrew Lapworth is a temporary lecturer in Cultural Geography in the School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol. His research interests centre on the spatialities and politics of contemporary art, new media, and technology. Drawing on the non-representational philosophies of Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon and Whitehead, his recently completed Ph.D. explored the emergence of new material practices, non-human experiences, and transversal encounters in interdisciplinary spaces of 'Art-Science'. Parts of this research have recently been published in the journals *Theory, Culture and Society*, *Cultural Geographies*, and *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture*.

Contact:

School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, University Road, Bristol, BS8 1SS.

E-mail: andrew.lapworth@bristol.ac.uk

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Notes

¹ Richie (1974: 52), for example, argues that the Japanese aesthetic sensibility of '*mono-no-aware*' is central to understanding Ozu's films, and can be translated as a sensitivity to 'the bittersweet sadness of the transience of things'. Perhaps the most famous examples of this sensibility of *mono-no-aware* in Ozu is Hara Setsuko's smiling acceptance in *Tokyo Story* (Ozu, 1953) when her young sister-in-law proclaims 'life is disappointing, isn't it?'

² For work exploring the resonances between Deleuzian concepts and the ideas of Zen Buddhist philosophy, and especially of the philosopher Dōgen, see Ott and Allik (2010) and Steintrager (2014).

³ Adding to the sense of disorientation in *Late Autumn* is the fact that Hara Setsuko again appears, but this time as the widowed parent rather than the daughter she played in *Late Spring*.

⁴ The term ‘pillow-shot’ was coined in relation to Ozu’s films by Burch who saw them as analogous to the ‘pillow-words’ (*makuratoba*) of classical Japanese poetry, ‘which usually occupy a short, five-syllable line and modify a word, usually the first, in the next line’ (Burch 1979: 160). Relatedly then, the effect of the ‘pillow-shot’ is to serve as a visual interruption that creates a different expectation for the next scene.

⁵ Viz. *Tokyo no Korasu/Tokyo Chorus* (Ozu, 1931), *Tokyo no Onna/Woman of Tokyo* (Ozu, 1933), *Tokyo no Yado/An Inn in Tokyo* (Ozu, 1935), *Tokyo Story* (Ozu, 1953) and *Tokyo Twilight* (Ozu, 1957).

⁶ This critique ignores the fact that many of Ozu’s earlier films, as well as some of his post-war films, directly addressed societal issues and conflicts, such as *Nagaya* *Shinshiroku/Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (Ozu, 1947) – Ozu’s first film after the end of World War II – which explores the impoverished and destitute situation of those orphaned in Japan following the war. *A Hen in the Wind* (Ozu, 1948) is another post-war melodrama that focuses on the prostitution during the war. However, as American controls on censorship intensified in the 1950s, Ozu had to experiment with more subtle and indirect forms of political critique through his visual style and pattern of spatial framing (Bordwell 1988). In *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, for example, Ozu cuts to an image of a soiled mattress, which is clear graphic match of the American flag, hanging to dry on a clothes line.